श्री ललित किशोर चतुर्वेदी: हमने देखा है कि जो हमारे पास आती है ...(व्यवधान).... नाम नहीं होता है। ...(व्यवधान)....

श्री उपसभापति: अब मैं कह रहा हूं कि आपका नाम आएगा, जो एसोसिएट करते हैं उनका नाम आएगा। श्री रवि शंकर प्रसाद।

Reported Remarks of Pope Benedict XVI on Conversion Legislation in India

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD (Bihar): Sir, I am raising a matter of great importance. Sir, India is a democracy governed by rule of law, and our Constitution is supreme. Under our Constitution, certain fundamental rights are given. Article 25 mentions freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. It is quite in accord with our civilisational ethos which say that conscience must be free, faith must be free, and adherence to religious preach must be free without any coercion or intimidation.

Sir, in our country taking this basic constitutional premise, many State Governments have also come with laws prohibiting forcible conversion. The Madhya Pradesh Legislature came with an Act in 1968; the Orissa Legislature came with an Act in 1968; and now Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan have also passed laws. This was challenged in the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court in a constitution bench, way back in the year 1977, said that, "the freedom to propagate does not mean the freedom to convert." That is the constitutional position in our country.

Sir, Pope Benedict XVI, as a spiritual and religious leader, occupies a very exalted position and is also entitled to my respect and the respect of the House. But, Sir, he has shown complete insensitivity to our concern when, as the head of Vatican at a formal occasion of presentation of credentials by an Indian ambassador, he criticised religious intolerence in India, and most important, he has termed as 'reprehensible' the attempt of certain legislators to legislate bills in this connection. Sir, this is grossly unwarranted. I protest it, and what is more important and I must say this that in Indian democracy a House is sovereign. A House can pass a law of a constitutional assignment. For the Pope to say that that House is enacting something reprehensible is grossly unwarranted. We protest and we condemn it. And what is a matter of greater concern is the ambivalence of the Government of India. It is maintaining a conspicuous

silence. Sir, the Government of India must come clear. It is not only a question of religious leader. He is the head of the Vatican. It is a gross interference in our internal affairs. We condemn this attitude' of the Government of India and we demand that the Government of India must respond. *...(Interruptions)...*

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ (Uttaranchal): Sir, the whole House associates itself with this issue. *...(Interruptions)...*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no *...(Interruptions)...* The Minister is responding *...(Interruptions)...* Yes, you all are associating *...(Interruptions)...* There were three notices. It was agreed that Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad will raise and others will associate. No, no. please, that was agreed. We have agreed that you should adhere to *...(Interruptions)...* Now, the hon. Minister will respond.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIANAND SHARMA): Sir, Shri Ravi Shankar Prasadji has raised a matter regarding the statement of the Pope on 18th of May. Sir, while accepting the credentials of our Ambassador to The Holy See on 18th May 2006, the Pope said in his speech, "The disturbing signs of religious intolerance which have troubled some region of the nation including, as I said, the reprehensible attempt to legislate clearly discriminatory restrictions on the fundamental rights to religious freedom must be rejected as not only unconstitutional but also contrary to the highest ideals of India's founding fathers who believed in a nation of peaceful co-existence and mutual tolerance between different religions and ethnic groups."

Sir, the *Charge de Affairs* of the Embassy of Holy See in New Delhi, Msgr. Tomasz Grysa, was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs on May 22, 2006. In no uncertain terms, the Government of India's disapproval and displeasure over the statement was conveyed to him. It was also pointed out that perhaps His Holiness, the Pope, had not been appropriately briefed on India's secular and democratic character. It was further pointed out that very few countries through history could demonstrate the tolerance and secular approach to religion which was enshrined in an innate component of India's approach and outlook. Sir, the same day, when the statement was made, that is, on the 18th May, the official spokesperson in a statement had said," It is acknowledged

universally that India is a secular and democratic country in which adherents of all religious faiths enjoy equal rights. The Constitution of India states that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." So, Sir, I would just like to share this with the House that the Government of India had taken note and the Government of India's response was firm, appropriate and timely. Thank you, Sir.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Status of Implementation of Recommendations contained In Sixth and Seventh Reports of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Petroleum and Natural Gas

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you Now, the Calling Attention motion regarding the recent five incident at Victoria Park in Meerut and the remedial measures taken by the Government in regard thereto. Shrimati Prema Cariappa, not here. Shri V. Narayanasamy, not here. Shri Rajeev Shukla. राजीव जी, एक मिनट, मिनिस्टर साहब को जाना है, he wants to make a statement. Mr. Minister, you can make a statement.

पेट्रोलियम और प्राकृतिक गैस मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (**श्री दिन्शा जे. पटेल**): मैं निम्नलिखित वक्तव्य सदन के पटल पर रखता हूं:-

I. विभाग –संबंधित पेट्रोलियम और प्राकृतिक गैस संबंधी संसदीय स्थायी समिति के छठे प्रतिवेदन में अंतर्विष्ट सिफारिशों के कार्यान्वयन की स्थिति।

II विभाग- संबंधित पेट्रोलियम और प्राकृतिक गैस संबंधी संसदीय स्थायी समिति के सातवें प्रतिवेदन में अंतर्विष्ट सिफारिशों के कार्यान्वयन की स्थिति ।

CALLING ATTENTION TO THE MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Recent fire incident at Victoria Park in Meerut and remedial measures taken by Government in regard thereto

श्री सजीव शुक्ल (महाराष्ट्र): धन्यवाद, उपसभापति जी, सबसे पहले तो मैं मेरठ की इस दुखद घटना पर अपना अफसोस प्रकट करता हूं।